The Labor of the Inhuman, Part I: Human

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Inhumanism is the extended practical elaboration of humanism; it is born out of a diligent commitment to the project of enlightened humanism. As a universal wave that erases the self-portrait of man drawn in sand, inhumanism is a vector of revision. It relentlessly revises what it means to be human by removing its supposed evident characteristics and preserving certain invariances. At the same time, inhumanism registers itself as a demand for construction, to define what it means to be human by treating human as a constructible hypothesis, a space of navigation and intervention.

Inhumanism stands in concrete opposition to any paradigm that seeks to degrade humanity either in the face of its finitude or against the backdrop of the great outdoors. Its labor partly consists in decanting the significance of human from any predetermined meaning or particular import set by theology—thereby extricating human significance from human veneration fabricated as a result of assigning significance to varieties of theological jurisdiction (God, ineffable genercity, foundationalist axiom, and so forth).

Once the conflated and the honorific meaning of man is replaced by a minimalist yet functionally consequential, real content, the humilific credo of antihumanism that subsists on a theologically anchored conflation between significance and veneration also loses its deflationary momentum. Incapable of salvaging its pertinence without resorting to a concept of crisis occasioned by theology, and unsuccessful in extracting human significance by disentangling the pathological conflation between real import and glorification, antihumanism is revealed to be in the same theological boat that it is so determined to set on fire.

Failing to single out significance according to the physics that posits it rather than the metaphysics that inflates it, antihumanism's only solution for overcoming the purported crisis of meaning comes by adopting the cultural heterogeneity of false alternatives (the ever increasing options of post-, communitarian retreats as so-called alternatives to totality, and so forth). Rooted in an originary conflation that was never resolved, such alternatives perpetually swing between their inflationary and deflationary, enchanting and disenchanting bipolar extremes, creating a fog of liberty that suffocates any universalist ambition and hinders the methodological collaboration required to define and achieve a common task for breaking out of the current planetary morass.

In short, the net surfeit of false alternatives supplied under the rubric of liberal freedom causes a terminal deficit of real alternatives, establishing for thought and action the axiom that there is indeed no alternative. The contention of this essay is that uni-

versality and collectivism cannot be thought, let alone attained, through consensus or dissensus between cultural tropes, but only by intercepting and rooting out what gives rise to the economy of false choices and by activating and fully elaborating what real human significance consists of. For it is, as will be argued, the truth of human significance—not in the sense of an original meaning or a birthright, but in the sense of a labor that consists of the extended elaboration of what it means to be human through a series of upgradable special performances—that is rigorously inhuman.

The force of inhumanism operates as a retroactive deterrence against antihumanism by understanding humanity historically—in the broadest physico-biological and socioeconomical sense of history—as an indispensable runway toward itself.

But what is humanism? What specific commitment does "being human" represent and how does the full practical elaboration of this commitment amount to inhumanism? In other words, what is it in human that shapes the inhuman once it is developed in terms of its entitlements and consequences? In order to answer these questions, first we need to define what it means to be human and exactly what commitment "being human" endorses. Then we need to analyze the structure of this commitment in order to grasp how undertaking such a commitment—in the sense of practicing it—entails inhumanism.

Section 1. Commitment as Extended and Multimodal Elaboration

A commitment only makes sense by virtue of its pragmatic content (meaning through use) and its demand to adopt an intervening attitude. This attitude aims to elaborate the content of a commitment and then update that commitment according to the ramifications or collateral commitments that are made explicit in the course of elaboration. In short, a commitment—be it assertional, inferential, practical, or cognitive—can neither be examined nor properly undertaken without the process of updating the commitment and unpacking its consequences through a full range of multimodal practices. In this sense, humanism is a commitment to humanity, but only by virtue of what a commitment is and what human is combined together.

The analysis of the structure and laws of commitment-making and the meaning of being human in a pragmatic sense (that is, not by resorting to an inherent conception of meaning hidden in nature or a predetermined idea of man) is a necessary initial step before entering the domain of making prescriptions (whether social, political, or ethical). What needs to be explicated first is what it takes to make a prescription, or what one needs to do in order to count as prescribing an obligation or a duty, to link duties and revise them. But it must also be recognized that a prescription should correspond to a set of descriptions which at all times must be synchronized with the system of modern knowledge as what yields and modifies descriptions. To put it succinctly: description without prescription is the germ of resignation, and prescription without description is whim.

Correspondingly, this is an attempt to understand the organization of prescription, or what making a prescription for and by human entails. Without such knowledge, prescriptive norms cannot be adequately distinguished from descriptive norms (that is, we cannot have prescriptions), nor can proper prescriptions be constructed without degenerating into the vacuity of prescriptions devoid of descriptions.

The description of the content of human is impossible without elaborating it in the context of use and practices, while elaboration itself is impossible without following minimally prescriptive laws of commitment-making, inference, and judgment. Describing human without turning to an account of foundational descriptions or an a priori access to descriptive resources is already a minimally but functionally hegemonic prescriptive project that adheres to oughts of specification and elaboration of the meaning of being human through features and requirements of its use. "Fraught with oughts" (Wilfrid Sellars), humanism cannot be regarded as a claim about human that can only be professed once and subsequently turned into a foundation or axiom and considered concluded. Inhumanism is a nomenclature for the infeasibility of this one-time profession. It is a figure for the impossibility of ever putting the matter to rest once and for all.

To be human is a mark of a distinction between, on the one hand, the relation between mindedness and behavior through the intervention of discursive intentionality, and on the other hand, the relation between sentient intelligence and behavior in the absence of such mediation. It is a distinction between sentience as a strongly biological and natural category and sapience as a rational (not to be confused with logical) subject. The latter is a normative designation which is specified by entitlements and the responsibilities they bring about. It is important to note that the distinction between sapience and sentience is marked by a functional demarcation rather than a structural one. Therefore, it is still fully historical and open to naturalization, while at the same time being distinguished by its specific functional organization, its upgradable set of abilities and responsibilities, its cognitive and practical demands. The relation between sentience and sapience can be understood as a continuum that is not differentiable everywhere. While such a complex continuity might allow the naturalization of normative obligations at the level of sapience—their explanation in terms of naturalistic causes—it does not permit the extension of certain conceptual and descriptive resources specific to sapience (such as the particular level of mindedness, responsibilities, and, accordingly, normative entitlements) to sentience and beyond.

The rational demarcation lies in the difference between being capable of acknowledging a law and being solely bound by a law, between understanding and mere reliable responsiveness to stimuli. It lies in the difference between stabilized communication through concepts (as made possible by the communal space of language and symbolic forms) and chaotically unstable or transient types of response or communication (such as complex reactions triggered purely by biological states and organic requirements or group calls and alerts among social animals). Without such stabilization of communication through concepts and modes of inference involved in conception, the cultural evolution as well as the conceptual accumulation and refinement required for the evo-

lution of knowledge as a shared enterprise would be impossible.

Ultimately, the necessary content as well as the real possibility of human rests on the ability of sapience—as functionally distinct from sentience—to practice inference and approach non-canonical truth by entering the deontic game of giving and asking for reasons. It is a game solely in the sense of involving error-tolerant, rule-based practices conducted in the absence of a referee, in which taking-as-true through thinking (the mark of a believer) and making-true through acting (the mark of an agent) are constantly contrasted, gauged, and calibrated. It is a dynamic feedback loop in which the expansion of one frontier provides the other with new alternatives and opportunities for diversifying its space and pushing back its boundaries according to its own specifications.

Section 2. A Discursive and Constructible "We"

What combines both the ability to infer and the ability to approach truth (that is, truth in the sense of making sense of taking-as-true and making-true, separately and in conjunction with one another) is the capacity to engage discursive practices in the way that pragmatism describes it: as the ability to deploy a vocabulary, use a vocabulary to specify a set of abilities or practices, elaborate one set of abilities-or-practices in terms of another set of abilities-or-practices, and use one vocabulary to characterize another.

Discursive practices constitute the game of giving and asking for reasons and outlining the space of reason as a landscape of navigation rather than as a priori access to explicit norms. The capacity to engage discursive practices is what functionally distinguishes sapience from sentience. Without such a capacity, human is only a biological fact that does not by itself yield any propositional contentfulness of the kind that demands a special form of conduct and value attribution and appraisal. Without this key aspect, speaking about the history of human risks reducing the social construction to a biological supervenience while depriving history of its possibilities for intervention and reorientation.

In other words, deprived of the capacity to enter the space of reason through discursive practices, being human is barred from meaning anything in the sense of practice in relation to content. Action is reduced to meaning "just do something," collectivity can never be methodological or expressed in terms of a synthesis of different abilities to envision and achieve a common task, and making commitment through linking action and understanding is untenable. We might just as well replace human with whatever we wish so as to construct a stuff-oriented philosophy and a nonhuman ethics where "to be a thing" simply warrants being good to each other, or to vegetables for that matter.

Once discursive practices that map out the space of reason are underplayed or dispensed with, everything lapses either toward the individual or toward a noumenal alterity where a contentless plurality without any demand or duty can be effortlessly maintained. Discursive practices as rooted in language-use and tool-use generate a deprivatized but nonetheless stabilizing and contextualizing space through which true

collectivizing processes are shaped. It is the space of reason that harbors the functional kernel of a genuine collectivity, a collaborative project of practical freedom referred to as "we" whose boundaries are not only negotiable but also constructible and synthetic.

One should be reminded that "we" is a mode of being, and a mode of being is not an ontological given or a domain exclusive to a set of fundamental categories or fixed descriptions. Instead, it is a conduct, a special performance that takes shape as it is made visible to others. Precluding this explicit and discursively mobilizable "we," the content of "being human" never translates to "commitment to human or to humanity." By undergirding "we," discursive practices organize commitments as ramifying trajectories between communal saying and doing, and they enact a space where the self-construction or extensive practical elaboration of humanity is a collaborative project.

Making a commitment to something means vacillating between doing something in order to count as saying it, and saying something specific in order to express and characterize that doing.

It is the movement back and forth, the feedback loop, between the two fields of claims and actions that defines sapience as distinguished from sentience. To make a commitment means "what else," "what other commitments" it brings forth and how such consequent commitments demand new modes of action and understanding, new abilities and special performances that cannot be simply substituted with old abilities because they are dictated by revised or more complex sets of demands and entitlements. Without ramifying the "what else" of a commitment by practically elaborating it, without navigating what Robert Brandom calls the rational system of commitments, a commitment has neither sufficient content nor a real possibility of assessment or development. It is as good as an empty utterance—that is, an utterance devoid of content or significance even though it earnestly aspires to be committed.

Section 3. Intervention as Construction and Revision

Now we can turn the argument regarding the exigencies of making a commitment into an argument about the exigencies of being a human, insofar as humanism is a system of practical and cognitive commitments to the concept of humanity. The argument goes as follows: In order to commit to humanity, the content of humanity must be scrutinized. To scrutinize this content, its implicit commitments must be elaborated. But this task is impossible unless we take humanity-as-a-commitment to its ultimate conclusion—by asking what else being a human entails, by unfolding the other commitments and ramifications it brings about.

But since the content of humanity is distinguished by its capacity to engage rational norms rather than natural laws (ought instead of is), the concept of entailment for humanity-as-a-commitment is non-monotonic. That is to say, entailment no longer expresses a cause and its differential effect, as in physical natural laws or a deductive logical consequence. Instead, it expresses enablement and abductive non-monotonicity in the sense of a manipulable, experimental, and synthetic form of

inference whose consequences are not simply dictated by premises or initial conditions. Since non-monotonicity is an aspect of practice and complex heuristics, defining the human through practical elaboration means that the product of elaboration does not correspond with what the human anticipates or with the image it has of itself. In other words, the result of an abductive inference that synthetically manipulates parameters—the result of practice as a non-monotonic procedure—will be radically revisionary to our assumptions and expectations about what "we" is and what it entails.

The non-monotonic and abductive characteristics of robust social practices that form and undergird the space of reason turn reasoning and the intervening attitude that it promotes into ongoing processes. Indeed, reason as rooted in social practices is not necessarily directed toward a conclusion, nor is it aimed at establishing agreements through the kind of substantive and quasi-instrumentalist account of reason proposed by Jürgen Habermas. Reason's main objective is to maintain and enhance itself. And it is the self-actualization of reason that coincides with the truth of the inhuman.

The unpacking of the content of commitment to humanity, the examination of what else humanity entitles us to, is impossible without developing a certain intervening attitude that simultaneously involves the assessment (or consumption) and the construction (or production) of norms. Only this intervening attitude toward the concept of humanity is able to extract and unpack the implicit commitments of being a human. And it is this intervening attitude that counts as an enabling vector, making possible certain abilities otherwise hidden or deemed impossible.

It is through the consumption and production of norms that the content of a commitment to humanity can be grasped, in the sense of both assessment and making explicit the implicit commitments that it entitles us to. Accordingly, to understand the commitment to humanity and to make such a commitment, it is imperative to assume a constructive and revisionary stance with regard to human. This is the intervening attitude mentioned earlier.

Revising and constructing human is the very definition of committing to humanity. Lacking this perpetual revision and construction, the commitment part of committing to humanity does not make sense at all. But also insofar as humanity cannot be defined without locating it in the space of reasons (the sapience argument), committing to humanity is tantamount to complying with the revisionary vector of reason and constructing humanity according to an autonomous account of reason.

Humanity is not simply a given fact that is behind us. It is a commitment in which the reassessing and constructive strains inherent to making a commitment and complying with reason intertwine. In a nutshell, to be human is a struggle. The aim of this struggle is to respond to the demands of constructing and revising human through the space of reasons.

This struggle is characterized as developing a certain conduct or error-tolerant deportment according to the functional autonomy of reason—an intervening attitude whose aim is to unlock new abilities of saying and doing. In other words, it is to open up

new frontiers of action and understanding through various modes of construction and practices (social, technological, and so forth).

Section 4. Kitsch Marxism

If committing to being human is a struggle to construct and revise, today's humanism is for the most part a hollow enterprise that neither does what it says nor says what it does. Sociopolitical philosophies seeking to safeguard the dignity of humanity against the onslaught of politico-economic leviathans end up joining them from the other side.

By virtue of its refusal to recognize the autonomy of reason and to systematically invest in an intervening—that is, revisionary and constructive—attitude toward human and toward norms implicit in social practices, contemporary Marxism largely fails to produce norms of action and understanding. In effect, it subtracts itself from the future of humanity.

Only through the construction of what it means to be human can norms of committing to humanity be produced. Only by revising existing norms through norms that have been produced is it possible to assess norms and above all evaluate what it means to be human. Again, these norms should be distinguished from social conventions. Nor should these norms be confused with natural laws (they are not laws, they are conceptions of laws, hence they are error-tolerant and open to revision). The production or construction of norms prompts the consumption or assessment of norms, which in turn leads to a demand for the production of newer abilities and more complex normative attitudes.

One cannot assess norms without producing them. The same can be said about assessing the situation of humanity, the status of the commitment to be human: humanity cannot be assessed in any context or situation unless an intervening, constructive attitude toward it is developed. But to develop this constructive attitude toward human means to emphatically revise what it means to be human.

A dedication to a project of militant negativity and an abandonment of the ambition to develop an intervening and constructive attitude toward human through various social and technological practices is now the hallmark of kitsch Marxism. While kitsch Marxism should not be inflated to the whole of Marxism, especially since class struggle as a central tenet of Marxism is an indispensable historical project, at this point the claim of being a Marxist is too generic. It is like saying, "I am an animal." It does not serve any theoretical or practical purpose.

The assessment of any Marxist agenda should be done by way of determining whether it has the power to elaborate its commitments, whether it understands the underlying mechanisms involved in making a commitment, and above all, whether it possesses a program for globally updating its commitments. Once practical negativity is valorized and the intervening attitude or the constructive deportment is dismissed, the assessment of humanity and its situations becomes fundamentally problematic on the following levels.

Without the constructive vector, the project of evaluation—the critique—is transformed into a merely consumptive attitude toward norms. Consumption of norms without producing any is the concrete reality of today's Marxist critical theory. For every claim, there exists a prepackaged set of "critical reflexes." One makes a claim in favor of the force of better reason. The kitsch Marxist says, who decides? One says, construction through structural and functional hierarchies. The kitsch Marxist responds, control. One says, normative control. The kitsch Marxist reminds us of authoritarianism. We say "us." The kitsch Marxist recites, who is "us"? The impulsive responsiveness of kitsch Marxism cannot even be identified as a cynical attitude because it lacks the rigor of cynicism. It is a mechanized knee-jerk reactionism that is the genuine expression of norm consumerism without the concrete commitment to producing any norms. Norm consumerism is another name for cognitive servitude and noetic sloth.

The response of kitsch Marxism to humanity is also problematic on the level of revision. Ceasing to produce norms by refusing to undertake a constructive attitude toward human in the sense of a deportment governed by the functional autonomy of reason means ceasing to revise what it means to be human. Why? Because norms are assessed and revised by newer norms that are produced through various modes of construction, complex social practices, and the unlocking of new abilities for going back and forth between saying and doing. Since being human is distinguished by its capacity to enter the game of giving and asking for reasons, the construction of human ought to be in the direction of further singling out the space of reason through which human differentiates itself from nonhuman, sapience from sentience.

By transforming the ethos of construction according to the demands of reason into the pathos of negativity, kitsch Marxism not only puts an end to the project of revision. It also banks on a concept of humanity outside of the space of reason—even though reason's revisionary force is the only authorized force for renegotiating and defining humanity. Once revision is brought to an end, understanding humanity and acting upon its situations has no significance, since what is deemed to be human no longer enjoys any pertinence. Similarly, once the image of humanity is sought outside of reason, it is only a matter of time before the deontological distinction between sapience and sentience collapses and telltale signs of irrationalism—frivolity, narcissism, superstition, speculative enthusiasm, social atavism, and ultimately, tyranny—heave forth.

Therefore, the first question one needs to ask a humanist or a Marxist is: Are your commitments up to date? If yes, then they must be subjected to a deontic trial—either a version of Robert Brandom's deontic scorekeeping or Jean-Yves Girard's deontic ordeal, where commitments can be reviewed on the basis of their connectivity, evasion of vicious circles and internal contradictions, and recusal instead of refutation.

If commitment to humanity is identified by active revision and construction, ceasing to revise and refusing to construct characterize a form of irrationalism that is determined to cancel out what it means to be human. It is in this sense that kitsch Marxism is not just a theoretical incompetency. It is also—from both a historical and cognitive

standpoint—an impulse to regress from sapience back to sentience.

To this extent, it is not an exaggeration to say that within every kitsch Marxist agenda lies dormant the germ of hostility to humanity and the humanist project. Practical negativity refuses to be a resignation, but it also refuses to contribute to the system and develop a systematic attitude toward the affirmative stance "implicit" in the construction of the system.

Humanism is distinguished by the implicitly affirmative attitude of construction. Insofar as the kitsch Marxism resignation implies an abandonment of the project of humanism and a collapse into regressive passivity, we can say that kitsch Marxism's refusal to both resign and to construct is tantamount to a position that is neither passive nor humanist. Indeed, this "neither/nor" approach signifies nothing but a project of active antihumanism that kitsch Marxism is in reality committed to—despite its pretensions to a commitment to human. It is in the wake of this antihumanism or hostility toward ramifications of committing to human that the identification of kitsch Marxist agendas with humanism appears at best as a farce, and at worst as a critical Ponzi scheme for devoted humanists.

In its mission to link the commitment to humanism to complex abilities and commitments, inhumanism appears as a force that stands against both the apathy of resignation and the active antihumanism implicit in practical negativity as the fashionable stance of kitsch Marxism today. Inhumanism, as will be argued in the next installment of this essay, is both the extended elaboration of the ramifications of making a commitment to humanity, and the practical elaboration of the content of human as provided by reason and the sapient's capacity to functionally distinguish itself and engage in discursive social practices.

This essay was first published in e-flux journal, issue 52, February 2014.

End of Part One.